



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Andy Biggs (R-Ariz.)
Examining the Scientific and Operational Integrity of EPA's IRIS Program

Chairman Biggs: Good morning and welcome to today's joint subcommittee hearing, entitled "Examining the Scientific and Operational Integrity of EPA's IRIS Program." Today, we will hear from witnesses who are experts in the fields of epidemiology and toxicology and learn about their interactions with EPA's IRIS program.

The original purpose of IRIS was simply to "identify and characterize the health hazards of chemicals that are found in the environment." However, this program has long suffered from a lack of scientific transparency and an inability to produce work in a timely manner. Even worse, IRIS appears to have been used by the previous administration as cover for unjustified and unscientific regulatory action, something well outside of the scope of the program's mandate.

And I'm far from the only one raising the alarm. In fact, both the National Academy of Science and the Government Accountability Office have been critical of the management of the IRIS program. In February of this year, GAO again included IRIS on its annual "high risk" list, which identifies federal programs that have greater than normal vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

In both 2011 and 2014, NAS made numerous recommendations for IRIS that have never been fully implemented. For example, NAS found that IRIS assessment methods and reporting continue to be a concern, especially in light of the extremely long process that IRIS takes to choose chemicals and complete its evaluations.

Despite the numerous deficiencies that were highlighted in both the GAO and NAS reports, IRIS fails to show any sign of improvement. It is now the role of Congress, as the ultimate steward of taxpayer dollars, to carefully assess whether IRIS can even be salvaged. I myself remain very skeptical and simply cannot support the program in its current form.

What I find most troubling is that IRIS may be providing conflicting or duplicative information and creating confusion for Americans regarding either the harm—or lack of harm—that any given chemical may possess. If that is indeed the case, IRIS poses a threat to the public's trust and safety and simply cannot be allowed to continue to operate.

I am also deeply concerned by the fact that we can actually point to cases in which determinations by IRIS have been inappropriately used to make regulatory decisions.

For example, the previous administration took action against a chemical manufacturer in Louisiana based on a faulty IRIS determination, even though that particular company was currently in compliance with all emissions regulations put forward under the Clean Air Act.

Actions like the one initiated by IRIS in Louisiana do not inspire confidence in our federal agencies. This Committee is committed to ensuring that EPA uses the best available science. IRIS, it appears, has failed to use even passable science on many occasions, and what is so troubling is that even when IRIS administrators are alerted to this fundamental problem, they take absolutely no corrective action.

We must also be committed to ensuring that EPA's actions are based on the highest levels of scientific integrity. The fact that IRIS has been subjected to continued scrutiny of its scientific processes and continued requests for Information Quality Act reviews should send a clear signal that the program is failing and is in serious danger of irrevocably subverting its mission.

All those concerns aside – and they are considerable – I am hopeful that the witnesses before us today can provide Congress with information to better inform actions that this Committee may take.

We all want to ensure the protection of American citizens from the potentially harmful impacts of chemicals. If IRIS is the appropriate program to do that, we in Congress must ensure that it is properly organized and makes informed decisions. Moreover, we must ensure that IRIS efforts to evaluate chemicals are based on real-world threats, not theoretical ones.

I look forward to learning more from our distinguished witnesses and have no doubt that this will be a wide-ranging and fascinating discussion.

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